



PHOTOS BY TOM SKULSKI/STEAMBOAT PILOT & TODAY

Xavier Knott celebrates with his one-on-one support partner, Chuck O'Connell, after completing the Emerald Envy Town Challenge race on Wednesday.

## Teenager conquers first Town Challenge

**Tom Skulski**  
Steamboat Pilot & Today

Xavier Knott, 16, took to the start line with excitement in the Novice/Youth Male 16-18 division of the Emerald Envy Town Challenge race on Wednesday. This was his first time competing in a Town Challenge event, and his family was eager to watch him race.

Knott, who is on the autism spectrum, races for the Steamboat Springs High School mountain biking team but is not used to large-scale community races.

"He has done some racing, but it's great for him to be a part of these community events," said Knott's mother, Ginger Johnston. "Being integrated into things that other kids in this town do, they see him out here and he's just another kid to them."

Knott first learned to ride a bike at eight years old, while he and his family were still living in Chicago. In 2016, he moved to Steamboat Springs and wanted to get into mountain biking.

Johnston was nervous at first but the Yampa Valley Autism Program provided him with a one-on-one support partner so he could participate in programs with the Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club.

"It was a great collaboration between the Yampa Valley Autism Program and the Winter Sports Club, and he was able to be a part of the mountain biking team from the very beginning," Johnston said.

While the Town Challenge is a competitive mountain biking series with a point system, it was also created to



Xavier Knott makes his final descent before the finish line with Chuck O'Connell at the Emerald Envy Town Challenge on Wednesday.

bring the community together to share in a common love for mountain biking. Knott took advantage of the opportunity and had a great first time competing.

Knott's one-on-one support partner for this event was Chuck O'Connell who biked behind him for the full 5.6-mile race while offering advice and encouragement throughout.

O'Connell is on the board of directors at the Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club who, in association with the Yampa Valley Autism Program, helped Knott compete in Wednesday's Town Challenge.

"This maybe feels a little more intimidating to him than a high school race and my role would be to help him with the social parts of the race, which would be when he might be getting

passed or if he wants to pass someone" O'Connell said.

Knott put together an impressive race, finishing with a time of 42 minutes and 38 seconds and was the only competitor in the Novice/Youth Male 16-18 division.

Knott said the best part of the day was, "mountain biking fast."

When he finished the race, the fun was not over. Knott was able to relax with some pizza and music provided by the event.

His joyful energy was infectious and he was proud of all he had accomplished.

"We're just excited that he has such great support from the winter sports club," Johnston said. "The coaches have just been incredible. So inclusive."

## How to fuel up for riding



### SPOKE TALK

These days, talking about what you ate at your last meal is almost as common as talking about what bike setup you've got. Everybody's talking about it. People mention their smoothie ingredients as casually as their bike components; the ingredients that make them run.

The thing is, eating to fuel you and your bike up the mountain doesn't have to be so complex, so niche. The foundations of a powerful plate are simple, just like riding a bike.

Let's go back to the basics: Build your meals with lean proteins, pair them with plants, bulk it up with fiber.

Protein is most well known for maintaining and building lean body mass, or muscle. Protein also provides essential nutrients critical for optimal brain and immune system function such as zinc, B vitamins, iron and selenium. Protein has also been shown to aid in the control of cardiovascular diseases, and support a healthy weight. Some healthy choices might include lean meats, fish, tofu, eggs, cottage cheese and yogurt.

All adults, especially athletes, should aim to have balanced meals that have a similar amount of protein at each meal. This will support the most optimal absorption and utilization of the protein and nutrients provided. A good way to achieve this goal is to "stack your proteins" by adding multiple protein sources at each meal to reach your desired intake and ensure a good mix of beneficial nutrients. Think oatmeal, made with your choice of milk, a collagen protein powder, walnuts on top and a side of yogurt or cottage cheese.

Now that you've primed

your plate with protein, load it up with plants. These are the powerhouse of the plate; the crank arm, if you will. They provide vital nutrients that unlock various processes in the body, and antioxidants that protect against daily stresses, including the stresses of athletic pursuits. Fruits and vegetables also provide us with fiber. Aim for a colorful variety of fruits and vegetables with each meal.

Finally, "gas up" with carbohydrate sources. Instead of focusing on "good" or "bad" carbohydrates, focus on fiber rich grains, vegetables and legumes. Some good examples include oats, brown rice, quinoa, whole grain bread, lentils, beans, and starchy fruits & vegetables such as sweet potatoes, corn and bananas. These are what will provide the energy required to push through the pedal stroke, balance on the technical rocky section, and go the distance.

These guidelines are recommended for pre- and post-activity plate building. During activity, our energy, protein, and fiber needs change. The body will largely rely on carbohydrates for moderate to high intensity activities, such as mountain biking & cycling, that last longer than 45 minutes. For this, consider a low fiber carbohydrate choice, such as honey, energy chews, or sports drink to provide quick energy without any belly distress.

Think of these pillars of a healthy plate as the different components on your bike. They all work together to optimize your performance. Sure, we can add fancy ingredients and supplements, just like shaving grams or speed shifting, but the framework is simple and will keep us rolling.

*Kat is a registered dietitian of 10 years and has helped athletes of all ages achieve their performance goals, and also serves as Routt County Riders' Program and Events Coordinator.*